

Sketch

Volume 30, Number 1

1963

Article 13

No One Was Looking

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No One Was Looking

by John Schremp

LARRY Snyder walked down Mayfield Avenue, turned the corner, and went up Crescent St. In the middle of the block behind well-trimmed shrubs stood the Patterson Clinic. Larry walked slowly. He looked only at the sidewalk. His hands didn't swing at his sides and the thumb of his right hand flicked his high school ring. He turned at the Patterson Clinic and went quickly inside.

Larry had seen the Patterson Clinic three weeks ago when he had come to this section of town to make a delivery for his mother. He had just got off work for the weekend and his girl and he were going to hear Ray Charles that night at the municipal auditorium. He had parked his car down the block and walked past the clinic with the embroidered handkerchief that his mother had sewn for a Mrs. Flannahan. He had avoided the cracks in the sidewalk by trying to adjust his pace to the length of the sections in the walk. He had let his hand drag along the shrubs in front of the clinic. And when he had come to the sign that said Patterson Clinic, he had looked around to see if any one was looking and then he had jumped up and touched it.

Today was different. Once through the revolving door, the smell of antiseptic reminded him of the tetanus shot he got when he had been spiked in a baseball game in junior high.

He walked up to the receptionist's desk and said, "I'm Mr. Smithfield. I've come to pick up the results of my wife's test."

The starchy receptionist looked up at him a moment and then said, "Ah yes, Mr. Smithfield. Was that the pregnancy verification?" He nodded. "Yes, the lab will have that in about a half hour. Will you wait?"

He nodded again and went over and sat in one of the fake leather chairs in the reception room. All around the room were copies of *Post* and *Time* with the covers completely or partially torn off. He lit a cigarette and looked at a scuff mark on his black loafer.

Goddamn, goddamn, goddamn. "About a half an hour" goddamn. Oh Jesus, please Jesus, help me — help me. — What are you talking about, you don't go to church, he won't help you, you don't even believe. So what are you doing? — But — Oh God — Jesus help me. I can see her now. In six months — we'll be married and she'll come to breakfast in our two-room flat with a belly that won't quit. Hair all messy and a worn-out bathrobe. "Two eggs or one?" — oh God, please help me. — All right, that's enough. She probably isn't pregnant. She probably just has skipped this month. It happens, emotional reaction. I used a rubber didn't I? They don't break. Jesus, what are you worried about? — But just one little sperm, one lousy sperm and I'm done, finished, out of circulation for good. Besides the time was just right. She was probably trying to get pregnant. Right time of the month and they can get pregnant just thinking about it. God damn!

He looked over at the ashtray stand. He considered carefully picking up the ashtray by the stem and walking over to the receptionist and smashing it down on the desk with all his strength and then floating up through the ceiling. He put the cigarette out and viciously pinched the lever that let the cigarette fall through.

All right, look at it; it isn't that bad. I'll get married and then settle down in a cheap but clean place. We'll have the

kid and I'll work hard on the job and then I'll get to be super and then maybe an office job. It'll be all right. Television in the evenings. Take care of the kids. Save my money and buy a little house. Work on the house. Garden. It will be a nice quiet life. — Then I'll die. — God damn son of a bitch! I'm twenty years old and already I have my life figured out until I die — stagnant pond — the whole goddamn thing is a stagnant pond. I'll sit in my house with my wife and kid and ferment like a stagnant pond in front of the television set. Really funny, real funny. The whole thing is a joke. — All just from one lousy sperm, one stubborn son of a bitch.

He lit another cigarette, recrossed his legs, and looked at a picture of a little girl in the *Post* with no cavities.

If she isn't pregnant — Jesus, please don't let her be pregnant. Oh Christ, I'd be so happy. Wouldn't it be nice if this was all over and she wasn't pregnant? If it was just all over. — No such luck, buddy. You got to face it, accept the facts, don't kid yourself with happy endings; it doesn't happen that way — but I can't get married and then rot away my life. I've got to find a way out. — My shot gun. If nothing comes out right I can blow my head all over my room. Then I wouldn't have to rot away my life like a stagnant pond. Aw hell, I'm not going to blow my head off. I haven't got the guts. I've got to find a way out — a way out.

I'll cut out. That's it, I'll cut out, leave this goddamn place and go to California, get a job out there and have a blast — hold it, buddy, hold it. I can't leave her here with a kid. I love her. What the hell am I trying to do to her? Jesus, she has a life too; I can't just leave her with a kid. She's a nice kid and besides I love her. But God, what will she look like in six months with that belly and morning sickness? And then diapers and baby smell and money; where will I get the money? I don't make enough now to support a wife, let alone a baby, Jesus.

The baby's the whole problem, I would marry her today and like it if she wasn't going to have a baby. How the hell am I going to take care of a baby. — Abortion! I'll get her an abortion. This solves the whole problem. If she's not pregnant everything's OK and if she's pregnant then she will have an abortion. Where? Where in the hell do you find an abor-

tion outfit and what about the cops, what if we get caught? I'll go to prison. — I'll just walk into a doctor's office and ask if he will perform an abortion, simple as that, and then the cops come out and put the handcuffs on me and I go to jail, but still maybe it'll work. — Got to find out about that.

OK, let's review the possibilities. First she might not be pregnant; second if she is I can kill myself; third I can marry her; fourth I can get an abortion; fifth I can cut out. Which one is the best choice? OH CHRIST! Please God don't let her be pregnant. Jesus, please please!

A young man in a white lab coat walked in and placed a sheet of paper on the receptionist's desk. Larry got up and walked slowly over to the desk.

"Ah yes, Mr. Smithfield." She picked up the paper and read it carefully. "Your wife's name is Catherine Smithfield?"

"Ah yes, yes it is," he said quickly.

"Well, Mr. Smithfield, your wife is not pregnant, that is, the test was negative. Her delayed period can be due to any number of things. I don't think there's cause to worry. She will probably have it soon, or she may even skip it."

Larry turned and walked over to a Coke machine which he hadn't noticed before. He put a dime in the slot and waited for the bottle to come sliding out. He opened it and drank it in three gulps so that the burning carbonation would tell him that he was alive again. He put the bottle in the rack and walked through the revolving door and stood on the steps long enough to notice how fine the cottonwoods looked off in the distance. And how blue the sky was. Then he walked down the path and under the sign that said Patterson Clinic. But he didn't jump up and hit the sign with his fingers. And no one was looking.

